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SIPDIS

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O'FRIEL

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TAGS: MARR PREL PTER TU I2
SUBJECT: IRAQ: TURKISH PARLIAMENT RENEWS OPERATION NORTHERN
WATCH

REF: ANKARA 4488

(U) Classified by DCM Robert Deutsch for reasons 1.5, b/d.

¶1. (U) On December 25, the Turkish Parliament approved by a show of hands the Prime Ministry's request to extend the mandate of Operation Northern Watch for six more months as of December 31, 2002.

¶2. (U) FM Yakis spoke on behalf of the GOT, explaining that the flights conducted by ONW were within the framework of principles and rules set by Turkey and that Turkey would closely follow the activities of the operation. He noted that ONW was necessary because the "conditions that would eliminate the threat in the region have not been realized." Furthermore, ONW prevented influxes of refugees from Iraq. Yakis argued that the continuation of ONW was in Turkey's national interest because tension and uncertainty continue in northern Iraq. He noted that all UN members are committed to the territorial integrity of Iraq, but if Iraq is found to possess WMD or misinforms the international community about its weapons, it would cause the US to intervene militarily. Yakis added that such an operation should be based on international law. Repeating Turkey's redlines on Iraq, he said the presence of PKK-KADEK in northern Iraq had been a problem for Turkey, and ONW has assisted Turkey in its fight against terrorism. Yakis reiterated Turkey's desire for Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, and Assyrians to live in freedom and security in Iraq, emphasizing that the Turkmen should have equal status with other ethnic groups, and traditional Turkmen regions should be protected.

¶3. (U) MP Necati Cetinkaya, a former State of Emergency Regional Governor, spoke on behalf of the ruling AK Party. He outlined the history of ONW since 1991, briefing on its predecessor "Operation Provide Comfort" and noting that ONW is a limited force with 63 aircraft and helicopters. Cetinkaya criticized NATO Allies for not supporting Turkey when 500,000 refugees crossed into Turkey in 1991. Now there was the possibility of another operation against Iraq, and he urged Baghdad to comply with the UN resolutions. He stressed that the extension of ONW would be useful in facilitating the government's goal of establishing authority in northern Iraq.

¶4. (U) Sukru Elekdag, a former ambassador to Washington, spoke on behalf of the opposition CHP. He criticized the late President Ozal for allowing 500,000 refugees, some of whom were armed PKK terrorists, into Turkey in 1991. He noted that his party had always opposed "Operation Provide Comfort" and "Operation Northern Watch" but said "in a period during which an operation against Iraq is being discussed, with the purpose of having freedom of movement in the region, it would be reasonable to extend the mandate of ONW."

¶5. (C) Comment: The extension of ONW's mandate should have been, and was, relatively simple for the AK Party to get approved, given that it holds almost two-thirds of the seats in parliament. As it happened, even the opposition CHP did not use the opportunity to take a stand opposed to that of the GOT at a time when public anxiety about US intentions in Iraq persists. This support for ONW may reflect a continuing concern about Iraqi refugees flooding into Turkey. The Parliament also knows that this extension is only a placeholder -- until they debate the larger issue of Turkish support for a possible US-led operation against Iraq. (Note: Embassy notes that the actual number of US and UK aircraft and helicopters currently allocated to ONW is 53, vice 63 as claimed by Cetinkaya.)
PEARSON